

Deal raises questions over Thomas strategy

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WASHINGTON — Sunday evening, as a second woman was preparing to testify that Judge Clarence Thomas had made unpleasant sexual remarks to her, Senate Republicans and Democrats privately agreed to keep the woman off national television.

The compromise meant that Angela Wright, who had been fired by Thomas at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, did not provide the testimony that Oklahoma Law Professor Anita F. Hill's supporters deemed crucial to buttressing her credibility. Instead, the transcript of a Senate staff interview of Wright was released to reporters

late that night and received little attention.

Republicans counted the compromise as a victory in their attempt to isolate Hill and raise doubts about her character and motives. Democrats said the decision not to require Wright's public testimony was the result of time constraints and concern about Republican threats to attack her.

The episode raises questions about the aggressive, gloves-off Republican strategy and the caution exercised by Democrats under the leadership of Sen. Joseph R. Biden Jr. (D., Del.), the Judiciary Committee chairman, whose handling of the hearing is being criticized by some members of

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his party as too soft. The Senate on Tuesday confirmed Thomas' appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court.

"The Republicans ran a three-day version of the Willie Horton ad about Anita Hill," said Bob Shrum, a Democratic political consultant, referring to the black prison inmate whose furlough became a heated issue in the 1988 presidential campaign of Democratic Gov. Michael S. Dukakis of Massachusetts. "They went to war and, with few exceptions, the Democrats kept pleading for peace."

Another example cited by a top Republican as a victory for the Thomas backers came last Friday when Republicans persuaded Biden to allow Thomas to appear a second time that day. In his second appearance, Thomas offered a point-by-point denial of Hill's charges.

"This gave us the newspapers the next morning, with an item-by-item denial," the GOP strategist said.

It also illustrated what some critics now consider a disastrous policy of fairness by Biden and fellow committee Democrats that allowed Republican senators, with the help of the White House and Department of Justice, to orchestrate an effective defense of Thomas.

For instance, the critics complained about Biden's interruption of Sen. Hank Brown (R., Colo.) after Hill had told Brown that she and Thomas had discussed *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court decision-making abortion legal. Thomas testified last month he had never discussed the case, but Biden ruled the matter out of bounds in the questioning of Hill. Staff members and Democratic con-

sultants said that committee Democrats were provided with tough questions for Thomas and the four women who spoke on his behalf Sunday, but that they did not use the material.

From the day in September that Hill's allegations of sexual harassment by Thomas surfaced, Biden adopted a cautious approach, some Senate staff members said.

Many Democrats believe that Biden was reluctant to delve into the unpleasant charges because of the challenge to his integrity in 1987 when he was accused of plagiarism as a Democratic presidential candidate.

But a spokesman for Biden contends the senator was simply being fair; his job was to conduct a hearing, not prosecute a case, he said.

At her news conference Oct. 7, after her statement was leaked to the press, Hill indicated that she believed Judiciary Committee staff members had not actively pursued her allegations and said that she had had to telephone them several additional times after she was contacted originally.

On Oct. 8, Mark Schwartz, a Judicia-

The handling of Wright's testimony was cited by critics of the Democrats' cautious strategy.

threatened to tar Wright if she testified. Sen. Alan K. Simpson (R., Wyo.) suggested Saturday that she was getting "cold feet."

In response to a Simpson question, Thomas said he had fired Wright after she called a fellow employee a "faggot." Wright has told friends that she never made the remark.

Rosalie G. Silberman, EEOC vice chairman and a Thomas supporter,

gave a version of the dismissal similar to Wright's that did not mention the slur.

People close to Wright said Wednesday that she was committed to testifying, even after she watched on television in Washington last Friday and Saturday as Republicans on the committee mounted a slashing campaign against Hill.

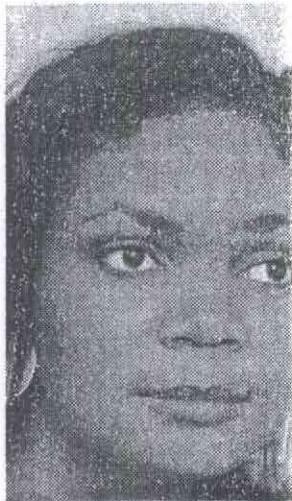
"It wasn't that she got cold feet," said someone close to Wright. "She knew it would be tough. She knew they would attack her credibility. She was prepared."

Saturday, FBI agents came to the offices of her lawyers in Washington and interviewed her for an hour. She was scheduled to testify Sunday night, but, as the hearings dragged on, it became apparent that Wright would not appear until very late.

Her attorneys discussed various options with the Judiciary Committee staff, including one in which she

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would forgo testimony in favor of releasing the written interview. Sunday evening, Biden read the letter into the record stating that members of the committee Wright had agreed that her statement would be placed in the record in lieu of her testimon



Angela Wright
"Was prepared" to testify

ry Committee staff member, heard that Wright, a former EEOC employee working at the Charlotte Observer, had written a column supporting Hill's accusations, according to transcripts of an interview with Wright by committee staffers.

On the morning of Oct. 10, with the Thomas hearings scheduled to re-open the next day, Wright was interviewed by telephone by Senate staff members from both parties. She insisted that the interview begin with her explanation that, like Hill, she had not come forward on her own.

Wright described several instances in which Thomas made sexual remarks to her and said he once stopped by her apartment uninvited and stayed until past midnight. She said he pressured her to go out with him and once asked her breast size.

"You look good and you are going to be dating me," she said Thomas told her in 1984, soon after he hired her as director of media relations at the EEOC.

Word of the Wright interview leaked to the press, and her name and parts of her story were published the morning the hearings began. Thomas' opponents viewed her as potentially tipping the balance in favor of Hill in the "she said-he said" debate, particularly after the judge categorically denied ever talking about sex with employees.

From the outset, Republicans